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BOTTLE-IMP.



JACKSON'S NOVELS

JAMES JACKSON.

2 Red Lion Court, Finsbury Street, London. E.C.

THE BOTTLE-IMP.

A TALE FROM THE GERMAN.

IT was a lovely Italian evening, when a young German merchant, named Richard, entered Venice, the widely celebrated seat of traffic and commerce. In consequence of it being then the period of the thirty years' war, all Germany was, at that time, a scene of dissension; no wonder, therefore, if the young merchant, who was a gallant more inclined to banqueting and luxurious indulgence than feats of chivalry, was not greatly displeased at his affairs calling him for some time towards Italy, where things wore a less hostile appearance, and where too, he had heard that there was no lack either of the richest mines, or the most delicate fruits—to say nothing of fascinating beauties, in which latter article our gallant piqued himself on being no ordinary connoisseur.

Seated in his gondola, he traversed the various canals of the city, struck with admiration at the beautiful buildings, and still more so at the lovely tenants, whom he frequently beheld peeping from their lattices. At length he arrived at a magnificent mansion, at whose windows he saw some ten or twelve charming girls.

"Now, would to heaven," exclaimed the captivated German, "that I had but the opportunity of saying a few words to one of those rare creatures!"

"Well," returned his gondolier, "and that be all, you have only to step out, and go boldly into the house at once; your time, I warrant me, will pass pleasantly enough."

"It may be pleasant enough, friend; to thee, to put thy jeers upon strangers; but dost thou suppose that I am such an errant loon as to follow thy knavish counsel, and to venture where I should not only be hooted out, but receive too a sound drubbing into the bargain?"

"My good master," replied the other, "do not think to teach me the customs of our city; only follow my advice, and, if you are not welcomed with open arms,—why then I am well content to lose my labour and my fare."

The youth now began to think the experiment worth trying; and soon found that the gondolier had not imposed upon him. These beauties, he quickly discovered, were far from being prudish or tyrannical; on the contrary, they were of that courteous sort who are never backward in shewing hospitality to the stranger, but ready to extend their complaisance to the utmost, for the trifling consideration of some fifty ducats. "This same Italy," thought the unwary youth, intoxicated by their voluptuous caresses, "is assuredly the most delightful place beneath heaven;" for he did not fail to impute the flattering reception he had experienced, in no small degree, to the comely person with which nature had favoured him. The demand, however, that was made upon his purse soon dissipated some of these pleasing reflections, as he discovered that, instead of having made a conquest of some princess, he had only been entertained by a courtesan, who now made a demand that nearly drained his purse. Yet did he not lose all his patience, since he was a gallant that did not consider the cost bestowed upon his pleasures flung away: he therefore retired with as good a grace as he could muster on such an occasion, and repaired to a tavern for the sake of diverting his spleen.

Having commenced his affairs in so notable a manner, the wild youth continued daily to indulge in revels, and in the society of mirthful faces. In all the company of brave gallants, with whom Richard now constantly associated, there was but one countenance overcast with gloom. It was that of a Spanish captain, who, though he never failed to be present at these scenes of riot, rarely bestowed a word upon the company, while his dark features were rendered still more gloomy by the visible uneasiness that sat upon them. Still his presence was endured, as he was a man of rank or wealth, and one too who regarded lightly the expense of treating his friends evening after evening.

Richard, in the meanwhile, although less liberal of his purse than on the first evening of his arrival at Venice, found his finances rapidly decreasing; and reflected with no small sorrow

that this gay and joyous life must quickly terminate. His associates were not slow in observing his melancholy, or in divining the cause of it,—this being, by no means, the first instance of the kind that had occurred within their society—neither did they spare their taunts upon the occasion, so that our hero was fain to venture among them the last precious relics of his purse. At this prosperous period of his history, the Spaniard called him, one evening, aside, and, with unexpected courtesy, requesting that he would accompany him abroad, conducted him to a lone and retired spot. The poor youth was at first rather alarmed; but at length he somewhat quieted his apprehensions by reflecting that his companion well knew that he had little about him of value, save his skin, and in that he was determined a hole should not be picked without returning the compliment.

The Spaniard, however, having first seated himself on the ruins of an old building, and compelled his companion to do the same, addressed him as follows:—

“I cannot help imagining, my dear young friend, that you stand greatly in need of that which has long become a burthen to myself—namely, the power of procuring whatever sum of money you choose, and whenever you please. This power, such as it is, I am willing to dispose of to you for a trifling consideration, besides some other advantages into the bargain.”

“What occasion,” inquired Richard, “can you possibly have for money, if you wish to part with the power of obtaining it yourself?”

“The case stands thus,” returned the captain. “I know not whether you are acquainted with certain little spirits that are called ‘Bottle-Imps;’ they are small black devils, enclosed in a little phial. Whoever possesses one of these, can command from it whatever worldly possession he desires most, especially abundance of gold. In return for these services, the soul of the person who possesses the imp becomes forfeit to Lucifer, in case he dies without having previously disposed of it. But this can be done only by receiving a less sum than that which he first paid for the spirit. Mine cost me ten ducats:—for nine it is yours.”

While the youth was reflecting on this extraordinary

offer, the Spaniard continued, "I could, if I pleased, easily get rid of the thing, by palming it upon some one as mere curiosity, in which manner a knavish fellow inveigled me to purchase it. But I wish not to have the weight of such an ill deed upon my conscience, and therefore, very honestly and fairly, acquaint you with the bargain. You are still young and high-spirited, and will not fail to meet with opportunities enough of disposing of your purchase, whenever you may become as weary of it as I am even now."

"My noble sir," replied Richard, "if you would not take it ill at my hands, I could inform you how often I have been imposed upon already, in this good city of Venice."

"Why, thou foolish varlet," exclaimed the enraged Spaniard, "thou need'st but call to mind the brave entertainment I gave last evening, to judge whether I would cheat thee for the sake of a paltry nine ducats."

"Who spends much, wants much," gently observed the young merchant, "and the longest purse we know has a bottom, although not a golden one. If, therefore, you yesterday spent your last ducat, to-day you may be hankering after mine."

"Excuse me if I do not chastise thee with a cold steel for this insolence:—that I do not do it, is because I still hope that you will help me to get rid of my bottle devil. Besides, it is my intention to perform penance, which would only be rendered still heavier thereby."

"Might we not, at least, be favoured with some specimens of the thing's abilities?" inquired the wary merchant.

"How may that be?" answered the other. "It will not remain with any one, nor aid any one, save him who has fairly purchased and paid for it."

The youth could not help feeling some alarm, for the place where they were sitting seemed a particularly lone and gloomy spot,—although the Spaniard assured him, that he would not employ compulsive means. Yet, in spite of his fears, his imagination dwelt upon the enjoyments that would be in his power, should he once become possessor of the little spirit: he determined, therefore, to try whether he could obtain the bargain at a cheaper rate.

"Witless fellow that thou art," exclaimed the Spaniard with a laugh, "it is for thy sake, and for the sake of those

who shall come after thee, that I demand the highest sum I can, that I may delay, as long as possible, the time when it shall be purchased for the smallest coin possible, and the purchaser thereby become inevitably forfeited to the devil, even because he cannot sell it again at a lower price."

"Well," said Richard, with a tone of delight, "let me but have it. I warrant me I shall not be very eager to get quit of my purchase in a hurry. If, therefore, I could have it for five ducats——"

"It is all one to me," returned the Spaniard, "but remember you are hastening on the minute when the evil spirit shall claim the last unhappy possessor as his own."

With these words he delivered up to his companion, in return for his gold, a small glass phial, wherein Richard could just discern, by the light of the stars, something dark that kept leaping up and down.

By way of making an experiment he demanded, although but mentally, to have double the amount of the sum he had just expended in his right hand, when he instantly felt ten ducats there. He now returned in glee to the tavern, and the rest of the company, who were still carousing there, were not a little astonished at perceiving what cheerful countenances were now worn by those who were lately in so melancholy a mood. But the Spaniard quickly retired without awaiting the costly banquet which, late as it was, Richard had ordered to be prepared, having first satisfied the demands of the wary host before hand, for his pockets were well lined with brave new ducats, which flocked thither merely at his wishing.

Those who are most anxious for a similar bargain, will best imagine what kind of a life our wild gallant now led; unless, indeed, they should be devoted to mere sordid avarice. Even the most charitable may well suppose that he spent not his days or nights in abstinence and fasting; the first thing he did was to choose, as the minion of his pleasures, the courtesan whose acquaintance cost him so dear at his first arrival at Venice. On this worthless creature did he lavish unheard of sums, purchasing for her a mansion in the city, and two villas, all of which he furnished with the utmost sumptuousness.

It chanced one day, as he was sitting with Lucretia, such was the name of his mistress, in the beautiful garden of one

of his villas, upon the bank of a little stream, that she suddenly snatched the phial which Richard constantly wore in his bosom, attached to his neck by a chain of gold. She had seized it before he was aware; and now held the little bottle up against the light. At first she was highly amused at beholding the antics of the little black figure, but at length she shrieked out in a voice of terror—"Ah! the nasty creature is a toad!" and immediately flung chain, phial, and bottle-devil, altogether into the water, where the current as quickly carried them away.

The youth endeavoured as well as he could to conceal his distress, lest his mistress should inquire farther into the matter, and perhaps accuse him publicly of witchcraft. He pretended, therefore, that it was merely a curious toy, then as soon as he could he quitted Lucretia, in order to consider what was best for him now to do. He was still in possession of his palace and villas, and had, moreover, in his pockets, no inconsiderable sum in the shape of bright ducats. But how great was his joy when, on putting his hand into his pocket to examine the latter, he discovered there his lost phial. The chain probably remained at the bottom of the stream, but the phial and its little black tenant had faithfully returned back to their owner.

"Now then," exclaimed he, in a burst of transport, "now then I find that I possess here a treasure of which no accident, no earthly power, can possibly deprive me!"

Nay, he had even kissed the very phial, had not the little jumping black figure excited his aversion, so loathsome did it appear.

If his doings were wild and mad enough before, they were now ten times worse. The infatuated youth regarded even the potentates and princes of the world with a disdainful compassion, convinced that not one of them was able to indulge in such a luxurious life as himself. Even Venice, the most opulent mart in the world, could hardly find dainties enough for his extravagant banquets. Did a well-meaning friend hint at the folly of this continual rioting, he would indignantly reply, "Richard is my name, and my riches are boundless."

Often would he, in a fit of intemperate mirth, rudely jest at the folly of the Spaniard, who had cast such a prize from

him and, as he had heard it reported, had retired into a convent.

On this earth, however, there is nothing that lasts for ever. This too our gallant soon experienced to be truth, much sooner, indeed, than he would otherwise have done, in consequence of the intemperance with which he plunged into all sensual delights. A langour like that of death seized his exhausted frame, in spite of all the virtue of his phial, which he vainly kept invoking for health, at the first attack of his disease. Recovery visited him not, but on the contrary frightful dreams.

It seemed to him that one of the phials which were standing by his bedside, began to set up a wild dance, jostling against the rest in a furious manner. After gazing at it for some minutes, Richard recognised it to be that in which the little spirit was enclosed, and exclaimed, "Bottle-devil, bottle-devil, thou assistest me no more, but rather destroyest that which should work my cure." Whereupon the little black thing sang in a hoarse voice:—

" Richard! Richard! thou prayest in vain:
Prepare thee now for eternal pain;
Therein must thou abide and endure,
Since spirit's power can work no cure,
No herb that groweth, death can heal;—
I joy, for that thou art mine I feel."

After which it immediately stretched itself out, quite long and thin, and notwithstanding that Richard held the phial stopped as closely as possible, it crept out between his thumb and the cork; it then suddenly became a large black man, who began to dance in the most hideous manner, clapping to and fro, at the same time, his huge dusky wings; and at length placed his hairy, leathern breast upon Richard's bosom, and his grinning face upon Richard's face, so that the latter felt as if he were himself assuming the hideous figure, and in a tone of wild agony screamed out for a mirror.

A cold sweat stood upon his brow as he awoke out of the ghastly dream, and he thought that he perceived a monstrous black toad creep down beside him into his bed; but, upon putting down his hand, he felt only the phial, in which the little black figure lay panting and apparently exhausted.

How awfully long did the remainder of this horrible night seem to the sick and phrenzied wretch. He dared not again

resign himself to sleep, lest the terrific vision should reappear; hardly, too, did he venture to open his wearied eyes even in the dark, lest he should perceive the monstrous fiend squatted in some corner of the apartment. Yet did he shut his eyes but for a moment, he thought that he was again upon him, and started up with horror. He rang aloud for his attendants, but no one came, all was still as the grave; as for Lucretia, he had not beheld her since he was first attacked by his disorder.

Thus did he lie in a state of torturing horror throughout the whole of that long, dreary night, the terror of which was increased, when he reflected that, if this single night appeared almost an eternity of terrors, what must seem the eternal night of hell on which no day would ever dawn—that night to whose dreadful visions there would be no end? He determined, at all events, upon getting rid of the fatal phial the very next morning.

When, however, the morning came, he felt his spirits so much revived, that he began to ask himself whether he had yet turned the "Bottle-Imp" sufficiently to account. Palace and villas, and all the luxuries wherewith they were furnished, seemed hardly enough; he, therefore, instantly demanded a great heap of ducats to be placed beneath his pillow, and, on finding them there instantaneously, he then began to reflect how best to dispose of the talisman. He knew that his physician was a great naturalist, and one who sought much after all monsters, and all such wonderful productions as are generally kept in spirits; he hoped, therefore, that he should be able to pass off the "Bottle-Imp" to the learned man as a curiosity of this description; for else the doctor was too good a Christian to have anything to do with the evil-creature. The deceit, indeed, could hardly be termed an innocent one, but need knows no niceties.

Accordingly he offered the doctor the little spirit, which was now become again exceeding lively, jumping to and fro in the bottle with great vivacity; insomuch that, anxious to examine what he considered a wonderful *lusus naturæ*, the learned man agreed to purchase it, if the price demanded for it were not too high. In order to satisfy his conscience as well as he could, Richard asked a sum as nearly approaching to five ducats as was possible; the doctor, however, would give only three, which, fearing to lose his customer altogether,

the other at last accepted, taking care, however, to bestow it all in alms upon the poor. But the money which he had found under his pillow, he carefully laid by, as the only fund upon which his future wealth and prosperity depended.

In the meanwhile his disorder continued to increase; he lay in a constant delirium, and had he still been tormented by the possession of the bottle devil, there is no doubt but that he would have actually died with terror and anxiety. At length, however, he gradually grew better; and now the only thing that seemed to retard his recovery, was his solicitude about the ducats, which he could no longer find beneath his pillow. At first he was very loath to make any inquiry after them; when, however, he did so, no one could give any account of them. Being able to obtain no information respecting the gold, it now remained for him to consider how he might best convert his mansion and villas into money. But here, too, he was reckoning without his host, for a throng of creditors appeared with various claims upon his estates, all duly signed by himself, and sealed with his own signet, he having at the time of his boundless prosperity, given these papers to Lucretia to fill up as she judged proper: all that he could do, therefore, was to depart as quickly as possible with the little he could save from the fangs of these harpies; so that he quitted all his splendour very nearly a beggar.

At this juncture his physician made his appearance, with a countenance betokening serious displeasure. "Doctor," exclaimed the unfortunate young merchant, "if it so be, that you are come hither like the rest of your fraternity with a large bill, I prithee, add another item to the account, and see, good doctor, that it be for opium, or some equally potent drug; for my last bread is now baked, as I know but too well I have no money to buy more."

"Nay, nay," replied the physician, "things are not yet so bad as that." I am not only ready to renounce every demand upon you, but have also prepared a certain, most efficacious medicine, that will quickly revive you from this despondency; all that I ask for it is two ducats."

"And most readily will I pay them," replied the youth, which having done, the doctor forthwith departed. On opening the box wherein he expected to find this cordial restorative, he

discovered a phial, but how great was his dismay on perceiving that it was that which contained the little bottle-devil; and that affixed to it, it had a label containing the following lines:—

“Thy body I strove to cure from ill,
But thou my soul hast sought to kill;
Yet, as my art, 'bove craft of thine,
Perceived full soon thy base design,
Let me then now retaliate,
To thee again revert thy fate;
Be thine once more the dreadful sprite;
And may'st thou feel his fellest might.”

Great, indeed, was Richard's alarm at finding that he had re-purchased his phial at so much lower a price. The only consolation that now remained, was to employ it as an instrument of revenging himself upon his treacherous paramour, which he effected in the following manner.

Having first of all summoned, by a wish, a sum of money double to that which he had lost, he carried and deposited it all with the nearest scrivener, excepting one hundred and twenty pieces, with which he betook himself to the abode of the faithless Lucretia. His reception was exactly such as he supposed his gold would procure him; his mistress was as lavish of her caresses towards him as she had ever been on any former occasion. After some time he displayed the curious toy he had brought, making the little black puppet, enclosed in the phial, perform abundant antics and tricks. This, he informed Lucretia, was exactly like the one she had once flung into the water. She, like the rest of her sex, was desirous of obtaining such a droll plaything; and, on the youth's sportively demanding a ducat for it, she paid it without hesitation. This bargain being completed, Richard hastened away as quickly as he could, and repaired to the scrivener with whom he had deposited his money. He now found, however, that gold sticks so fast to certain people's fingers, that they cannot shake it off. The honest man stared with the utmost astonishment, protesting most vehemently that he had never clapped his eyes upon the young man before. This worthy specimen of probity had written his receipt for the sum deposited with him with a kind of ink that totally disappeared in the course of a few hours: therefore, when Richard produced his voucher, he found that he had merely a piece of plain paper. He thus found himself suddenly reduced to

poverty, and would, indeed, have been completely a beggar, had he not still thirty ducats remaining from what he had been squandering at Lucretia's.

He who lies in too short a bed, must even pull up his legs; he who has no bed, must couch on the bare floor; who cannot afford to ride, must walk: so was it with our merchant, who was now fain to become a pedlar.

For this purpose he provided himself with a suitable box; but with what a heavy heart did he buckle it on, to take his stand with some ware in those very streets where, but a few weeks before, he used to pass with a splendid retinue. In a little while, however, he became somewhat reconciled to his new occupation, having no lack of customers. "If I proceed at this rate," thought he, "I may yet again become a prosperous man, and that too at no very distant time. I will then return to my native Germany, where I shall find myself more comfortable than ever, after having been in the power of the accursed bottle devil, and having got out of his clutches by my own skill and dexterity."

With such thoughts did our newly-made pedlar cheer and console himself. on retiring for the night to an obscure inn. On his taking off his box, several of the guests, attracted by curiosity, began to examine the various wares it contained.

"My good friend," inquired one of these inquisitive gentry, "prithee, what queer kind of animal is this which you have got here in this phial, and which keeps jumping about at so strange a rate?"

To his great terror Richard now, for the first time, perceived that along with the other articles in his box, he had purchased the fatal bottle-devil.

Instantly did he offer it to the bystanders for a mere trifling sum, but not one of them could endure the hideous creature, neither could Richard inform them of any particular use it was of; he, nevertheless, continued to harass them at such a rate with his entreaties to purchase it, that at length they thrust the impertinent chapman and his wares into the street.

In the anguish of his distress he now returned to the person who had sold him the box, and pressed him to take back the little imp at a lower price. The fellow, however, quite out of temper at being disturbed at such an unseasonable hour, and little disposed to become a dealer in such

strange commodities, bade him begone, and take his trumpery to Lucretia, for she was the person that had lately sold him the stock of trinkets, among which was that queer-looking phial.

Without waiting to hear another syllable, Richard ran off to Lucretia, as quickly as if he had a devil driving him instead of himself carrying a devil. He found the lady along with a couple of young noblemen. At first they rated the uncourteous pedlar for daring to intrude upon them; but afterwards they purchased nearly his whole stock, for Lucretia had now recognized some of her old valuables, and also their present vendor: nor did the sight of him, in such a condition, seem by any means to damp her mirth. As to the "Bottle-Imp," no one would purchase it; for Lucretia protested that she could not endure to look at the ugly thing.

"Say not so," replied Richard, my fair inconsiderate: permit me but to whisper in your ear some of its virtues, and I am sure you will hesitate no longer."

She now retired a little aside, and the pedlar disclosed to her all the powerful, occult qualities of his little "Bottle-Imp."

"How now! thou cheating varlet," cried the incredulous dame, "dost thou think to impose upon people by such fine tales as these? Were it true, I warrant me, thou hadst taken care first to provide thyself with something better than those filthy rags. Out with thee for a knave! Begone, or I'll denounce thee for a sorcerer and dealer in the black art, and then both thyself and thy devil may be burnt together."

Both the gallants now took part in the fray, and kicked the unfortunate pedlar and his wares down stairs: whereupon the poor wight, unable to resent the indignity, and terrified at the idea of being roasted for a wizard, hastened to leave Venice with all possible expedition; insomuch that, on the following day, he had quitted a territory which he now regarded as the land of all his misfortunes.

In the meanwhile he did not forget a nearer cause of his unhappiness, but, drawing the little dusky imp from his pocket, he cried—"Thou miscreant devil! If I again call on thee for thy services, it is, that I may rid myself of thee for ever."

Having thus vented the bitterness of his feelings, he forth-

with desired to have a sum much more considerable than the last, and then almost sinking under its weight, he proceeded to the next town. Here he purchased a splendid equipage, hired a numerous retinue, and set out for Rome, convinced that there he should soon be able to find some one who would not scruple to take his unwelcome little companion off his hands. As often as he expended a ducat did he require the imp to replace it by another, in order that, after selling his phial, he might still have the entire sum. This seemed to him no more than a fair compensation for the horrors he constantly endured; for in addition to the nightly visits of the black apparition that never failed to come, and lay upon his breast, he saw also the bottle-devil constantly frisking about the phial, with the most horrible glee, as if now quite certain of his prey at the expiration of the due period of his service.

Hardly had his wealth and the figure which he made, procured him admission into the first circles of Roman society, than his constant dread would not allow him to wait until a proper opportunity should offer of freeing himself from his tormentor. He was continually offering his phial to every person, demanding for it three groschen in German money; insomuch that he, in a short time, became to be considered as a lunatic, and was a subject of ridicule to every one. Money makes a good mood, and many a fair friend withal: so was it with our Richard; yet no sooner did he produce his phial, and begin to talk of three groschens, than all present were glad to escape his importunity.

So great, at length, was his despair, that he could no longer endure to remain at Rome, but determined to try his fate in war, hoping that by some chance he might there, at least, get rid of the cause of his misery. He had heard that two small Indian states were engaged in hostilities towards each other, and prepared to espouse the cause of one party. Adorned with a rich golden cuirass, and a superb crest of plumes, and armed with two light hunting pieces, an admirably tempered sword, and two beautiful daggers, did he set out, mounted on a noble Spanish steed, and attended by three followers, all of whom were bravely equipped.

A volunteer of so gallant a bearing needed not to offer his services in vain. Richard soon saw himself, therefore, attached to a troop of brave comrades, and led such a jovial life in

camp, with drinking and singing, that his mortal apprehensions, and nocturnal visions gradually left him. Having received a good lesson from what he had experienced at Rome, he was now cautious in offering his strange ware to sale; observing not to urge it with such suspicious earnestness. Indeed, he had hardly spoken of it to any one, hoping thereby to have an opportunity of meeting with some one who would not refuse it, if offered quite unawares, and with seeming indifference.

One morning as Richard was playing at dice with some companions, they were suddenly summoned to battle, by an alarm sounded on the trumpet. The cry was instantly "to horse!" With joyous spirits did our warrior leap upon his steed as it neighed and pawed the ground: the leaders encouraged on their troops, the signal sounded for the combat. A troop of the enemy's cavalry advanced, apparently for the purpose of hindering their attack: yet they soon retired before the powerful charge of their adversaries, nor were Richard and his followers the last among his pursuers. The balls now began to whiz in the air, and many a rider fell from his horse, rolling to the earth in his blood. Spite of his personal courage, Richard could not think without shuddering of the immediate peril in which he was placed, fearing that some fatal ball might, in a single moment, deliver him into the power, not only of the bottle-devil, but of Lucifer himself. Scarcely, however, had he expressed a wish to escape from the scene of danger, ere his steed bore him away to a wood, which was situated at no great distance.

So hard did he spur the animal, and urge him to flight, that it at length stopped quite exhausted. He then alighted, being himself greatly fatigued; unbuckled his own cuirass and sword, and laying himself down on the grass, said—"This fighting is dangerous work at the best, but much more so with an imp in one's pocket!" He now wished to devise what course it would behove him next to pursue, but fell into a profound sleep. After he had indulged in a repose of several hours, he was awakened by the sound of voices and approaching footsteps. He stirred not, in hopes that he might be passed by unnoticed, but soon found that the attempt would not succeed, for a voice, of no very friendly or musical tone, thundered out—"Ho! Fellow, art thou

already dead, or are we to have the honour of killing you?" Looking up perforce at this uncourteous address, the unfortunate Richard perceived a musket levelled at his breast. The fellow who held it was a ruffianly looking foot-soldier, and the others had already seized upon his steed and equipments as their booty. Struck with terror, he supplicated most earnestly for mercy, but if they were determined upon shooting him, requested that one of them would first purchase a little phial which he had in his pocket.

"Senseless poltroon that thou art!" cried one of the fellows, with a grin, "to suppose that we here barter for anything; although that we will take the bargain off thy hands thou needest not fear: and so saying he seized hold of the phial and thrust it into his bosom.

"In God's name thou art welcome to it," cried Richard, "if thou canst keep it. Yet that thou canst not do unless thou first purchase it."

The soldiers laughed at hearing him speak thus, and thinking him somewhat crack-brained, rode off without paying further attention to him. On feeling in his pocket, however, Richard found that the phial was there again, whereupon holding it up that they might see it, he called after them. The fellow who had taken it was struck with amazement; and as, on thrusting his hand into his bosom, he did not feel it, he ran back in order to recover his booty.

"Did I not tell thee," said Richard mournfully, "that it would not continue with thee? Pay me but the trifle I demand, and it is thy own."

"Juggler!" returned the soldier, "dost thou think to defraud me of my well-earned spoils by these conjuring tricks of thine?"

And holding the phial carefully in his hand, away he ran to overtake his companion; suddenly, however, he stopped short, exclaiming, with an oath, that it was gone again. Whilst he was searching for it on the ground, Richard called out to him once more, "Return hither, my good friend, for it is again in my pocket."

On finding this really to be the case, the soldier became more desirous of possessing so curious and wonderful a thing. On these occasions indeed it always manifested more than usual liveliness and agility, knowing that such bargains accelerated

the final term of its servitude. Three groschen, however, still seemed too much to the soldier. "Well then, since thou art so unwilling to part with thy coin, let it be a single groschen, and take away thy purchase in good hour."

Thereupon was the bargain concluded, the money paid, and the little bottle-imp delivered up to its new master. While the soldier and his companions were examining the singular creature, and amusing themselves with its grim antics, Richard was reflecting upon his future destiny. His heart now felt quite light; but, unfortunately, his purse was quite as light as his heart; nor did he know to what to betake himself, since he would not venture to his troop, although he left there not only his followers and his equipments, but all his money. He was partly ashamed of his disgraceful flight, and partly afraid lest, if he returned, he should be put to death as a deserter. It then occurred to him that it would not be amiss were he to accompany these troopers, having gathered from their discourse that they belonged to the other party, among whom he was certain of remaining unknown; and now that he had lost all his cash, and gotten rid of his little imp to boot, he felt that he had had returned some of his courage in exchange, and was by no means disinclined to venture his life once again, in the hope of obtaining some valuable spoil. He accordingly gave utterance to his wishes; and his proposal being accepted, he forthwith set off with his new comrades.

The captain was not very scrupulous in taking into his service such a tall and well-built young fellow as Richard, who was therefore considered as fairly enlisted among them. He was still, however, displeased with his lot: for, since the last battle, the two armies remained quite inactive, without either attacking the other, a treaty of peace being in agitation. Under these circumstances there was little danger of wounds, but at the same time, very little opportunity of fattening on booty and plunder. Instead of the latter, the troops must perforce content themselves with their camp fare and their scanty pay. In addition to this, while most of his comrades had already enriched themselves in the preceding engagements, Richard, the once wealthy merchant, was almost the only one who was a beggar among opulent neighbours. Very naturally, therefore, he grew weary of such a life, so that once having received his monthly pay—too inconsiderable for his wants,

and yet too much for him not to attempt something with it—he determined to go to a suttling booth, and see whether the dice would not befriend him more than either traffic or war had hitherto done.

His success at play was as chequered as usual, now winning, now losing; and so did it continue until late at night, when all the dice turned up against Richard, whose cash was quite gone, nor would any one give him credit for a doit. He now offered to strike his cartridges, having nothing else to offer; the proposal was accepted, and, as the throw was about to be made, Richard perceived that the soldier who had accepted the stake was the very same one who had purchased the bottle-imp, by the assistance of which he would, doubtless, be certain of winning. He would fain have cried "Hold!" but the dice had already decided in favour of his opponent. Uttering curses at his ill fate, he quitted the company, and retired in the dark to his tent. A comrade who had been equally unfortunate, but whose brain was less heated by wine, now took him by the arm, and as they were proceeding together, inquired whether he had any more cartridges in his tent?

"No," returned Richard, furiously: "did I possess any, they should serve me for the same purpose."

"Then," said his companion, "you would do well to provide yourself with fresh ones, for should the commissary come to examine you, and find you without them, he will order you to be shot."

"Zounds! that were plaguy work indeed! but I have neither cartridges nor wherewithal to procure them."

"Thine is a sorry case indeed, then," replied the other, "for the commissary comes hither on the morrow."

This intelligence, although it did not tend greatly to tranquillize Richard, served in some degree to sober him; he went, therefore, to inquire of his comrades if any one would lend him some cartridges. All, however, flouted him as a wild, idle fellow, and bade him not interrupt them with unseasonable nonsense. In the utmost apprehension lest he should be ordered to be shot the very next day, he rummaged everywhere in the hope of finding some loose coin, but could meet with no more than five hellers. Late as it now was, he hurried from tent to tent, in order to find some one who

would supply him with the cartridges. Some laughed at, others abused him, but not one made any reply to his demand. At length he came to a tent, the occupant of which he discovered to be the very soldier who had so lately stripped him of his cartridges at play.

“Comrade,” cried Richard, with great agitation, “if any one, it is yourself who must assist me in this extremity. But just now you have plundered me of all my cartridges, nor is it the first time in my life that you have proved the cause of my misfortunes. On the morrow the commissary comes, and he, unless I can produce my cartridges, will certainly give orders for me to be shot; you must, therefore, either give or lend—at least sell me some.”

“As to either giving or lending, that I have long ago forsworn; yet, to ease your distress, I will agree to sell you some. What money, therefore, have you?”

“But five hellers,” replied Richard, in a melancholy tone.

“Well,” said the soldier, “to show thee that I am willing to do thee a comrade’s turn, there are five cartridges for thy five hellers. Now then betake thyself to thy rest, and disturb neither me nor my neighbours any longer.”

Which request, as soon as he had received what he sought, Richard instantly hastened to comply with.

On the following day the troops were examined, and Richard passed muster with his five cartridges, at which he, for a while, considered himself supremely happy, in spite of all the misfortunes he had undergone. His felicity was, however, but of very short duration; the joy he had first felt at finding himself out of actual danger soon subsided, when, on retiring to his tent, he found himself obliged to dine off coarse bread, without any better sauce to it than his own reflections. “What would I now give,” sighed he, “had I but one of all the ducats which in the days of my folly I so wantonly squandered away?”

Hardly had he formed the wish, when, lo! a beautiful bright golden ducat was in his hand. But, alas! the thought of the bottle-imp, which instantly flashed across his mind, damped all the satisfaction he had otherwise felt at finding himself the possessor of so acceptable a piece of gold.

At this instant, the comrade of whom he had purchased the cartridges entered the tent with a look of anxiety,

and said—"Friend, I have missed the phial with the little black creature; you must remember it well; it is the same that I formerly purchased of yourself. Has it happened that I sold it to you by mistake for a cartridge, for I wrapped it up in a piece of paper, and it was lying close beside them?"

With a trembling hand did Richard now search in his cartridge-box, and found the first thing he took hold of, to be the fatal phial wrapped up in the form of a cartridge.

"Ha!" cried the soldier, "this is all right. To say the truth, ugly as the creature is, I should be exceedingly loath to lose it, since I somehow cannot help fancying that it helps me to good luck. So, comrade, take one of thy hellers back, and return me my bottle." Richard acceded to this demand.

Yet was poor Richard ill at ease, after having met with his bottle-imp once more, and having had it again in his own possession; he could not help imagining that he saw it grinning at him between the folds of his tent, and that it would strangle him in his sleep. Much as he stood in need of refreshment, he now flung the piece of money from him; and at length his terror, lest the accursed being should once more return while he continued there, arose to such a pitch, that he fled from the camp, and entered a thick wood, where, exhausted by alarm and fatigue, he sunk down in a wild, lonesome spot.

"Ah me!" he exclaimed, as he lay there panting, "that I had but a camp-bottle with water to keep me from dying with faintness!"

And the bottle with the water stood beside him. It was not till after he had drunk a hearty draught out of it, that he thought of asking himself by what means it came there. The bottle-imp now occurred to him; when putting his hands into his pockets, and finding the phial there, overcome with sudden horror, he fell down in a deep swoon.

While he continued in this state, his former horrible dream returned, wherein he beheld the little bottle-imp stretch himself out longer, and at last fix himself, grinning most hideously, upon his breast; he expostulated with the monster, asserting that it no longer belonged to him; but the creature replied, with a hollow, satanic laugh, "Thou boughtest me for a heller, and thou must therefore sell me for less, or the bargain will not hold good."

"Alas! alas!" screamed the unhappy wretch, "how fortunate did I at one time consider myself at finding that, let me cast away the phial ever so far, it always returned to me—but that it does so, is now my misery—yes, my everlasting misery." And he thereupon began to run furiously among the wild bush-wood, dashing in the dark against trunks of trees and pieces of rock, and hearing, at every step he took, the phial clinking in his pocket.

At day-break he arrived at an open plain, which had the appearance of being well cultivated, and had a cheerful appearance; somewhat revived by this prospect, he began to hope that what he had experienced was merely a wild dream, and that the phial would prove to be no more than a common bottle. He took it out, therefore, and held it up against the sun; but, alas! he still perceived the little black monster dancing up and down, and stretching out towards him, as usual, its little ugly misshapen arms, as if it would seize hold of him. Uttering a loud cry of agony, he let the phial fall on the ground, but only to feel it in his pocket immediately afterwards. The thing of the utmost consequence for him now to do was to inquire everywhere for some coin of less value than a heller. Nowhere, however, could he meet with any such piece of money; so that, at length, despairing of being ever able to get rid of the monster that now threatened inevitably to become his master, he no longer thought of calling upon it for its services; his increasing horror, on the contrary, would permit him to think of nothing but his miserable situation. Thus did he wander up and down, subsisting upon charity and alms: and as he had a wild, crazed appearance, and was continually beseeching every one for some piece of money less than a heller, he was considered as a madman, and was called "Crazy Half-heller," by which appellation he was soon known far and wide.

Thus was it with poor Richard and the satanic imp in his phial:—but instead of accompanying him through his continual and unvaried misery, let us pass over a considerable interval and arrive at an important event.

He had one day lost himself in a wild, rocky country, and had sat down to rest beside a little stream, whose murmuring seemed to sympathize with his affliction. A loud sound of a horse's feet rung on the rocky surface of the ground, when

there came, riding upon a large black wild-looking steed, a man of gigantic figure, and exceedingly terrific countenance; he was attired in a deep blood-red garment, and approached the spot where Richard was sitting.

"Wherefore so melancholy, young stranger?" said he, addressing himself to the youth, who involuntarily shuddered at his voice, as if with a vague presentiment of something evil.

"I should take thee to be a merchant: hast thou then been making a bad bargain?—Hast purchased anything at too high a price?"

"Alas! no—rather at too low a one," returned Richard in a tremulous tone.

"Ay, so I should think indeed," rejoined the grim horseman with a horrible laugh. "And hast thou then got for sale a thing that they call a bottle-imp?—or am I mistaken in conjecturing you to be a crazy Half-heller?"

The poor youth was hardly able to say "yes," so great was his horror, expecting every instant to behold the apparition's mantle expand itself into a pair of bloody wings, and his steed to assume a more terrific, spectral appearance, breathing forth infernal flames from its nostrils; and, lastly, that the monster would carry off his wretched soul to the regions of eternal misery.

But the ghastly horseman said, in a somewhat milder voice, and with less appalling mien:—"I perceive for whom you take me: yet be comforted, for I am not he; I rather present myself to rescue you, if so may be, from his power, having for some days past been searching for you, in order to become the purchaser of your phial. To confess the truth, my friend, thou hast paid indeed a most terrible small sum for it, nor can even I myself inform you where it is possible to meet a coin of less value. But, listen and obey me. On the other side of this mountain there resides a prince who is a sad dissolute young fellow. When he comes to the chase on the morrow I will first withdraw him from his attendants, and then cause a frightful monster to fall upon him. Wait thou here till midnight, and then proceed just as the moon rises above that jagged rock, towards that gloomy defile to the left, but neither hurry nor loiter in thy pace, so wilt thou arrive at the spot precisely as the monster has seized the prince in

his frightful paws. Attack it, but courageously;—it must yield to thee; and drive it down the steep cliff into the sea. Then, as a recompense for having delivered him, demand of the prince that he cause two half hellers to be coined for thee; let me have them, in order that, with one, I may become the purchaser of thy bottle-imp.”

So spoke the grisly horseman, and then, without waiting for any reply, rode off slowly into the wood.

“But where am I to find thee when I have obtained the half hellers?” cried out Richard.

“At the Black Fountain, of which each old crone hereabouts will be able to inform thee;” and then with solemn, but wide outstretching pace, did the horrible steed bear away its no less terrific rider.

Night closed in, and the rising moon shortly after appeared above the craggy tops of the rocks which had been marked out to him. The pale wanderer then raised himself tremblingly, and entered the dark defile. All seemed there cheerless and gloomy; seldom was a pale moonbeam able to penetrate above the lofty precipices; a dark oppressive vapour too, as if exhaled from graves, seemed to fill the narrow pass; in other respects there was nothing particularly terrible in its appearance. Richard felt himself by no means disposed to linger in the gloomy valley; yet, adhering to the strict injunction laid upon him by the mysterious horseman, he did not venture to quicken his pace, resolutely determined not to snap short at once the only slender thread that still attached him to light and hope.

After the lapse of several hours some red streaks of dawn cast a glimmering light across his path; a reviving breeze played upon his forehead. But, just as he was about to emerge from the deep valley, and enjoy the forest scenery, and the azure waters of the sea that lay expanded at no great distance before him, he was disturbed by a piercing cry of distress. On looking round he perceived a horrible animal attacking a youth in a magnificent hunting dress, who had fallen on the ground. Richard’s first impulse was to rush instantly to the stranger’s rescue; yet his courage failed him as soon as he clearly discerned the monster, and saw that it resembled a huge grisly baboon, with a stag’s antlers on its forehead; and, notwithstanding the cries of the wretched

man for succour, he was about to turn back. But suddenly calling to mind all the horseman had said, and inspired by the dread of his eternal doom, he ran and attacked the monster of an ape with a knotty club, just as it had seized the unfortunate hunter in its paws to fling him up into the air, and then catch him upon his branching horns as he descended to the ground.

Flushed with success, the youth now returned triumphantly to the hunter whom he had just rescued, and who, as he expected it would be, announced himself as the prince of that territory. The prince gave his promise that he would gladly bestow whatever he should request.

"Then I supplicate you, for the love of God, to order that some half hellers be immediately struck for me, even though it be only two."

Whilst the prince was regarding his strange petitioner with astonishment, some of his train came up, and, on hearing the adventure, and the singular boon that had been craved, one of them recognised in the person of the suitor the poor crazed half heller.

The prince began thereupon to laugh, whilst Richard, clasping his knees, conjured him in the most moving manner, protesting that unless he obtained the half hellers his soul was doomed to everlasting perdition.

To this the prince replied; while he still continued to laugh, "Rise up, my friend; I have pledged my princely word, and if you persist in demanding them, I will engage to supply thee with half hellers to thy very heart's content. But, if a still lesser coin will suit your purpose, I can accommodate thee without the aid of my mint-master, for the neighbouring provinces all maintain that my hellers are so light that three of them are requisite to pass for a single ordinary one."

"Were that, indeed, the case—" said Richard.

"Thou art, indeed, the first," returned the prince, "that has ever doubted it. Should they, however, upon trial, prove not suitable for your purpose, I here promise to order some less valuable to be coined for your especial use—provided, however, that it be possible so to do."

He now inquired his way towards the Black Fountain, when some children who were present ran away, shrieking with affright; and the host informed him, not without shuddering

himself, that it was a place frequented by demons and evil spirits, but hardly ever visited by mortal being.

On penetrating farther into the cavern the darkness became so great that he could no longer discern any terrifying shapes. He now proceeded with the utmost caution, groping his way with a stick lest he should fall into some abyss. Opposite to him was a spring gushing from the rock; and in this the grim horseman was washing both his face and hands, but the horrid stream was of an inky hue, with which it stained whatever it touched; for when the gigantic figure turned round towards Richard, the latter perceived that his visage was become like that of a moor, and thereby formed a terrific contrast to his blood-red garments.

"Shudder not," cried the hideous being; "this is only one of the ceremonies which I am obliged to perform in honour of the devil. Each Friday I am bound to wash myself thus, on account of the sins of earlier days. I am also compelled to stain my garment afresh with my own blood."

So saying, he began to laugh in the most frightful manner, that the very rocks re-echoed, and the sable steed, which had hitherto stood motionless, seemed to shrink with terror at the awful sound. "Now then, friend," added he, after a while, "hast thou brought me any half hellers?"

Upon Richard showing him his purse he took three of the pieces and gave him a heller in exchange; one of which he directly paid back again, as the purchase money for the Bottle-Imp, that now lay crouched up melancholy at the bottom of the phial, so that he felt quite heavy. At perceiving this, the unknown purchaser laughed again most violently, and exclaimed, "Nothing can avail thee, fiend; all resistance is in vain. In token, therefore, of thy obedience, let me have, instantly, as much gold as my strong steed can bear."

And no sooner had he uttered the command, than the enormous beast stood panting beneath the golden load. Then the blood-red horseman having mounted on its back, it began to crawl up the perpendicular sides of the rock, just as a fly does up a wall, and disappeared for ever.

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**PUBLISHED BY
JAMES JACKSON.**



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